

WANDERERS HELD BY LATE GOAL

A **DRAMATIC** injury time equaliser by Bishops Stortford substitute Gareth Conroy robbed Wycombe Wanderers of a thoroughly deserved victory in Saturday's Rothmans Isthmian League encounter at Loakes Park. Wycombe, who dominated most of the game could justly claim, "We wuz robbed."

What made it even more galling for Wycombe was that Stortford snatched that late goal with only 10 men on the field, their centre half Vic Clarke having been sent off seven minutes earlier for felling Alan Davies in an off-the-ball incident.

That should have sewn up the match for the Blues, but they temporarily relaxed and Stortford took the oppor-

By MICHAEL KNOX: Wycombe Wanderers 2, Bishops Stortford 2

tunity to steal — that's the only word for it — a point which their play had hardly deserved.

Yet Wycombe could only have themselves to blame, for they should have sewn up the match before the last quarter. Howard Kennedy (three times) and Ian Pearson all missed great chances which would have turned their overwhelming superiority into goals.

Still it was encouraging that Wycombe were creating chances and the man mainly responsible was new signing Howard Kettleborough who joined from Southern Leaguers Dunstable in mid-week.

Kettleborough, a rangy centre-forward, added the height upfront that has been so missing

this season. At last the Blues have someone upfront, who is willing to take the knocks and set up chances for others.

On Saturday, Kettleborough, who has gained Isthmian League experience with Hitchin, made one goal and could have scored a couple himself but for the quick reactions of goalkeeper Kitson. But Kettleborough isn't just a big lumbering forward without skill.

One brilliant turn of his in the penalty area which set up a chance for Kennedy was worthy of someone half his size. His huge ambling strides took him over the ground deceptively fast and he controlled the ball well at close quarters. In short he is a high class player who can only benefit the team as a whole.

Kettleborough replaced Dylan Evans who was relegated to substitute while Wycombe made two other changes from the side that had gained that welcome win at Kingstonian. Striker Ian Pearson came in for John Priestley, while

John Maskell returned after a long time out with a leg injury to take over between the posts from Peter Spittle.

Maskell looked far from fully fit. He showed signs of a slight limp when chasing for the ball and left his fullbacks to take some of the goalkicks. Still manager Ted Powell obviously reckoned that a half-fit Maskell is better than no Maskell at all.

His lack of mobility could well have contributed to Stortford's taking a shock lead after nine minutes. Tony Gough's long looping cross into the goalmouth was headed home by Kenny Gaine, who rose above the Wycombe defence. Maskell, coming out to narrow the angle, was beaten by the pace of the header. On another day the keeper might well have challenged Gaine for the ball.

For a while Stortford, inspired by this goal, played like the side who had beaten Tooting 5-0.

But once Wanderers raised the pace of the game, the visitors more and more resembled the team who had lost 1-0 to bottom club Ilford. In short they lacked consistency.

In the next 10 minutes Kennedy, relishing his forward role, twice moved into threatening positions only to miss the target. He headed wide from close range after Bobby Davies's floating cross to the far post had left him clear.

Then put in the clear by Gavin Fraser's through ball, Kennedy screwed the ball inches wide of the far post with only the goalkeeper to beat. But Kennedy made amends in the 25th minute when he equalised from close-range after Fraser's cross to the far post had been nodded down by Mick Holfield.

This was the boost Wycombe needed and with their defence continually pushing up, they took the game by the scruff of the neck. The Stortford goal had a remarkable escape when both Keith Mead and the dangerous Holfield saw shots scrambled off the line in a desperate goalmouth mêlée.

Stortford's luck could not hold for ever and Wycombe snatched the lead two minutes before half-time. Pearson, fouled by Flack on the right hand edge of the penalty area, took the free-kick himself. He sent it beyond the far post where Kettleborough rose in commanding fashion to head down to the feet of Holfield, who completed the job.

Wycombe should have sewn up the game in the opening stages of the second half. Kennedy had a shot blocked from five yards while Pearson tapped the rebound inches wide. Kettleborough then came into the action. In quick succession he saw a header blocked on the line and then Kitson make a point blank save from a close range shot.

Kettleborough was also involved in the move which gave Pearson the best chance of all to clinch the game. He pumped a ball upfield to Pearson who, starting inside his own half raced clear of the covering defence and needed only the goalkeeper to beat.

He was heading towards the right hand post, but instead of moving left when Kitson came out, Pearson darted right, narrowed the angle and lost control of the ball to give away a goalkick.

Pearson, who still tends to be selfish on the ball, caused all problems to a harassed Stortford defence, and it was probably out of sheer frustration that centre-half Clarke felled the admirable Alan Davies with a blow in the face in the 83rd minute.

Referee Mr Drew, like many of the spectators, did not see the incident as it was 'off the ball.' But after consulting linesman Mr. T. Powell, he ordered Clarke from the field much to the delight of the home fans who were baying for revenge.

Now it seemed that Wanderers must be home and dry against a 10 man side. But Stortford redoubled their efforts and were rewarded when Eddie Dillsworth jumped over a cross from the right to leave Conroy free at the far post. He fired the ball past the helpless Maskell and then danced a jig of delight.

The home fans were stunned into silence to see Wanderers fritter away two more points in their bid to climb nearer to the top of the table.

WANDERERS: J. Maskell; M. Sorenson, B. Davies, K. Mead, A. Phillips, G. Fraser, A. Davies, M. Holfield, H. Kettleborough, I. Pearson, H. Kennedy, sub: D. Evans (not used).

BISHOPS STORTFORD: P. Kitson; C. Harris, B. Davis, F. Flack, V. Clarke, T. Gough, D. Leakey, T. Smith (sub; G. Conroy 70 mins), E. Dillsworth, P. Twigg, K. Gaine.

Referee: P. Drew (Upminster).
Half-time 2-1. Scores: Wycombe — Kennedy (25 mins), Holfield (43); Stortford — Gaine (9), Conroy (90).



Howard Kennedy (half hidden) powers home a left foot shot to score Wycombe Wanderers' first goal against Bishop's Stortford on Saturday, and (below) Mick Holfield makes it 2-1 from close range just before half-time.

